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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/OSAC AND DS/IP/NEA

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SUBJECT: OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT FOR YEMEN

REF: 08 STATE 132056

The following is the annual OSAC Crime/Safety report for the year ending December 31, 2008.

11. OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY SITUATION: Yemen is a poor, developing country. The central government has control over the major cities and towns, while traditional tribal powers control the outlying areas. Tourists and expatriates run the greatest risk of encountering criminal elements in those areas. This lack of central control in certain areas has allowed Yemen to be used as a transit point for Islamic extremists and weapons. However, non-terrorist-related violent crimes against foreigners are rare. Land disputes are common even in Sanaa, and frequently evolve into exchanges of gunfire within urban areas. Kidnappings are also a persistent problem throughout Yemen. Yemeni society, on the whole, does not express an anti-American sentiment.

12. POLITICAL VIOLENCE: Political violence is prevalent, usually occurring during demonstrations when the Yemeni government over-asserts its authority. Demonstrations in the past year have not targeted U.S. Government facilities or U.S. business interests.

There is a large anti-government group in northern Yemen, known as the Al-Houthi rebels. In June, there were escalating battles between Al-Houthi rebels and ROYG forces a few kilometers outside of Sana'a. Currently, a cease fire exists between the ROYG and the Al-Houthis, but there continues to be tensions between the two forces which could again ignite into a wider conflict.

In the south, there are tensions over what is perceived as unequal treatment between northerners and southerners. Protests are common and, at times, end with violent action on the part of the ROYG, which can spur additional violence from demonstrators.

13. POST-SPECIFIC CONCERNS: The consular information sheet for Yemen provides a good overview of the crime and safety situation in Yemen. Yemen is in an earthquake zone and flooding can be a problem in the rainy season. Caution should be exercised when traveling in "wadis" (dry river beds), as they are subject to flash floods. In October 2008, a massive flood affected areas throughout eastern Yemen, killing hundreds and displacing tens of thousands. Yemen's emergency fire capabilities are marginal. There is no "911" for emergency services. Road travel is one of the most dangerous aspects of Yemen. The lack of safe driving habits, traffic regulations, and poor state of repair of the vehicles on the road create a difficult environment.

2008 saw a significant increase in terrorist-related activity; westerners are warned to use caution when traveling in Yemen. Throughout the months of March to June both Sana'a, and Yemen as a whole, experienced several terrorist attacks. In September, one of the worst terrorist attacks in Yemen in over a decade occurred at the US Embassy, and resulted in the death of eighteen people. Al-Qaeda in Yemen has claimed responsibility for many of the attacks, and continues to remain a formidable presence.

Kidnappings are a persistent problem throughout Yemen. In mid-December, armed tribesmen attempted to kidnap a British

diplomat in the Bait Bous area of Sanaa. One day later, three German nationals were kidnapped in that same vicinity and later released. In a tribal area, three South African nationals were also kidnapped and later released. The motivation behind the kidnappings appears to be disagreements with the ROYG or financial disputes with western companies operating in the tribal areas.

¶4. POLICE RESPONSE: Police in Yemen are poorly equipped, paid, and trained. Local police will assist victims of crime but may ask for a gratuity for the service. When a foreigner is involved in an accident, it is best advised to remain on scene. In the event of serious injuries, efforts should be made to get the victim to a hospital and wait for the police and victim's family to arrive. Leaving the scene of an accident, especially if there are injuries, can lead to demands of retribution and payment to the victim's family. In the event of a serious problem involving a criminal incident or accident, the U.S. Embassy can be contacted at 755-2000 or 755-2170 (after hours). Visitors to Yemen should register with the Embassy Consular Section so that their whereabouts are known in case of an emergency. Foreign businesses, including locally-based American firms, follow local customs and deal with tribal leaders and ROYG ministries to facilitate operational and personal security.

¶5. MEDICAL EMERGENCIES: The major hotels (Movenpick, Sheba, and Sheraton) have English-speaking operators who can assist in an emergency. Major hospitals located in Sana'a are:

Modern German Hospital, tel: 608-888; University of Science and Technology Hospital, tel: 471-122; and Saudi German Hospital, tel: 313-333 or 329-885/6.

For further information, the U.S. Embassy Regional Medical Office can be contacted at tel: 967-1-755-2160.

¶6. TIPS ON HOW TO AVOID BECOMING A VICTIM: It is recommended that visitors read the latest State Department Travel Warning announcement and check with the Embassy Regional Security Office for the latest threat/security-related information. Do not display large amounts of cash in public or wear expensive jewelry. Dress conservatively. Refrain from walking in sparsely-populated areas with poor lighting. While driving, always keep the windows up and doors locked. The markets and shopping areas have a few pick-pockets. Be aware of your surroundings and carry belongings in a fanny pack or shoulder bag. Do not leave items in your vehicle that could invite theft. Avoid sight-seeing events that involve police, security forces, or violence. Travelers are advised against casual travel to rural areas. Travel is particularly dangerous in the tribal areas north and east of Sanaa, close to the border with Saudi Arabia. Armed tribesmen in those areas have kidnapped a number of foreigners in attempts to resolve disputes with the Yemeni government.

¶7. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: U.S. Embassy Sana'a tel: 967-1-755-2000 or 967-1-755-2170 (after hours). In the event of an after-hours emergency, the Embassy Duty Officer may be reached through the numbers provided.

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